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Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 248545

FOR WILSON

FOLLOWING REPEAT KUALA LUMPUR 5691 ACTION SECSTATE 05 OCT 76

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 5691

E.O. 1165 GDS
TAGS: SREF, MY
SUBJECT: INDOCHINA REFUGEE BOAT CASES

1. AT THE END OF AN EXTENDED CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER DATUK HUSSEIN ONN ON OCTOBER 4. I RAISED WITH HIM THE VIETNAMESE REFUGEE BOAT CASES. HE APPEARED GENERALLY AWARE OF THE PROBLEM, BUT NOT OF THE DESPERATE PLIGHT OF THOSE BEING SHUNTED FROM PLACE TO PLACE ALONG THE LITTORAL OF THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, SO I TOOK THE OCCASION TO OUTLINE THE SITUATION AS WE SAW IT.

2. I NOTED THAT THERE WERE ABOUT 350 REFUGEES NOW IN MWAYSIA; 300 ON THE EAST COAST OF THE PENINSULA AND ABOUT 50 IN SARAWAK. THESE BOATS ARE STILL ARRIVING AT THE RATE OF ABOUT ONE A WEEK, FILLED WITH MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN. THEY ARE USUALLY SMALL FISHING CRAFT, OVER-CROWDED, AND UNFIT FOR VOYAGES OUT OF SIGHT OF LAND.
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3. THE STATES AROUND THE SOUTH CHINA SEAS HAVE BEEN
IN SOME CASE TOTALLY UNWILLING,
RELUCTANT TO RECEIVE THESE REFUGEES. IF THE BOATS APPEAR
SEAWORTHY THEY ARE PROVIDED WITH FUEL AND PROVISIONS
AND SENT BACK TO SEA. AS THE ABOVE FIGURES INDICATE,
MALAYSIA HAS ALLOWED A NUMBER TO COME ASHORE ON A TEM-
PORARY BASIS AND THE REFUGEES ARE BEING CARED FOR
BY THE RED CRESCENT SOCIETY AND THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT
WITH FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE UNHCR. THE
MALAYSIAN AUTHORITIES ON THE EAST COAST, HOWEVER, ARE
UNDER INSTRUCTIONS NOT TO PERMIT ANY FURTHER BOATS
TO LAND.

4. THE UNITED STATES HAS BEEN COOPERATING WITH THE
UNHCR IN PROVIDING PERMANENT REFUGE FOR THOSE WITH
RELATIVES IN THE UNITED STATES OR WHO CAN MEET OTHER
CRITERIA. OF THESE SO-CALLED BOAT CASES, WE HAVE
ALREADY TAKEN MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED FROM MALAYSIA,
HAVE AUTHORIZATION TO TAKE 50 MORE, AND HAVE SUBMITTED
THE NAMES OF OVER ONE HUNDRED WHO MAY MEET OUT CRITERIA.
THE U.S. CANNOT BY ITSELF PROVIDE A SOLUTION TO THIS
HUMANITARIAN PROBLE. OTHERS SHOULD DO THEIR PART.
WE WERE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED FOR THOSE NOT PERMITTED
TO LAND. MERCHANT SHIPS PASSING THEIR SINKING SMALL
BOATS WERE RELUCTANT TO PICK THEM UP BECAUSE AUTHORITIES
AT THE NEXT PORT OF CALL REFUSED TO ALLOW THEM TO
BE DISEMBARKED.

5. I NOTED FURTHER THAT THE U.S. WAS OFTEN TOLD
THAT WE HAD A CONTINUING ROLE TO PLAY IN SOUTHEAST
ASIA AND THAT WE SHOULD ASSIST THE COUNTRIES OF THE
REGION TO DEVELOP THEIR CAPACITY TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR
OWN SECURITY. IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THE AMERICAN
PEOPLE WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO PLAY THIS ROLE IF THE
U.S. WAS FORCED TO BEAR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE
CONSEQUENCES OF OUR EFFORT IN THE PAST TO PROVIDE
SUCH HELP TO ONE OF THEIR NEIGHBORS.

6. PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT MALAYSIA HAS TRADITIONALLY
RESPONDED TO HUMANITARIAN CASES OF THIS NATURE. IT
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HAD TAKEN IN ABOUT 1200 MOSLEM CAMBODIAN REFUGEES
FOR PERMANENT SETTLEMENT BECAUSE THEY ARE RACIALLY
AND RELIGIOUSLY EASILY ASSIMILATED. THE
VIETNAMESE, HOWEVER, WERE DIFFERENT, AND A SIGNIFICANT
FLOW WOULD CREATE POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES. I SAID THAT
I APPRECIATED THE PROBLEM FACING HIS GOVERNMENT, BUT
FELT THAT SOME WAY SHOULD BE FOUND TO AVOID AN INEVITABLE
SUCCESSFION OF TRAGEDIES WHILE THE UNHCE FOUND SOME

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ACCEPTABLE INTERNATIONAL SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM.
UNDERHILL. UNQUOTE ROBINSON

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NNN

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